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12 December 1969

NOTE FOR: A/DD/S&T

SUBJECT: The Future of The U-2 and Its Management

Don, herewith some thoughts in response to your request.

1. I agree with you completely that the first question for the USG is whether it wishes to keep a [] U-2 capability in being for possible future contingencies.

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a. But such a capability can almost certainly not be employed over the USSR. Nor, in my view, should it be over the [] theater. Elsewhere, except for possible occasional use here and there, this leaves Communist China as the principal theater for possible U2R employment -- for a few years and until such time as China's SAM defense system brings prohibitive operational risks.

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b. But furthermore, as I have previously mentioned, the U2R has little feasibility for China operations if the broader interests of US policy continue to argue refraining from mainland overflights.

c. I personally assume that we will continue to meet such US policy caution for the foreseeable future. Thus, the question of the USG's even retaining a U-2 capability in being over the next couple of years, say, means realistically that, for x million dollars a year, the US will have only an operational

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U-2 capability against offshore China and certain other (non-Chinese, non-Soviet, [REDACTED]) targets elsewhere -- plus a contingent capability against mainland China, in the event that present policy caution is modified.

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d. This latter point is, to my view, the principal hinge to whether the USG should keep the U-2 capability at all. My own policy answer would be to O.K. a continuance of present U-2 programs for perhaps another year or so, but then mothball the capability unless events in the meantime had either opened up China mainland flights, developed significant uses for the U-2 elsewhere in the world, or placed high premium (higher than at present) on keeping a contingent capability in being for future China uncertainties.

2. With respect to whether the CIA or the USAF should direct an on going [REDACTED] U-2 program, assuming a USG decision to continue the program for awhile, my view is that CIA would be a clear and easy choice over USAF management, for a number of reasons:

a. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The SR-71 North Vietnam experience is not comparable, since this is a war situation where the high survivability capabilities of the vehicle and the overt nature of the general US effort make the policy risks acceptable. Short of somewhat similar situations elsewhere, and in environments where the U2R would have high chances of operational survivability, USG commitment of U-2's would almost certainly have to continue to be [REDACTED]

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b. The CIA management record has been a good one in this respect. I see no pressing need to change from experienced hands to inexperienced.

c. I am sure it would take considerable time and perhaps more money than at present before the USAF could hope to begin equalling these necessary techniques.

d. Also, the U2R may have only a given number of years' operational life, anyway, before Chinese and perhaps other defensive systems begin to make U-2 risks unacceptable. Thus, about the time the USAF had got into the swing, it might be about time to begin planning the wrap up of the program.

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China Intelligence Activities Coordinator

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